

Rules of the Game

Making Magic Items (Part Six)

By Skip Williams



Sometimes, an item taken from a rulebook just won't do. This week, we'll begin considering the fine art of making new items from scratch.

Minor Variations

Sometimes, a player doesn't want an entirely new item, just something with a few alterations. For example, a player with a monk character would love to have an *amulet of mighty fists*, but she has grown to depend on the extra protection she gets from her *amulet of natural armor*. So, the inevitable question arises: Does an *amulet of mighty fists* have to be an amulet? The answer is of course not! However, that begs another question: If not an amulet, what kind of item should it be?

The Body Slot Affinities sidebar on page 288 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* can help answer the second question. A look at the table there shows that bracers (combat), gauntlets (destructive power), or even a belt (physical improvement) are the most appropriate alternatives. Considering that our example monk wants to pound foes with her fists and that she probably already owns *bracers of armor*, gauntlets probably are the best bet. So, what should the gauntlets cost?

You can reasonably assume that a pair of *gauntlets of mighty fists* ought to have the same base cost and market price as the amulet (6,000 to 150,000 gp), depending on the enhancement bonus the item provides. The +1 version (6,000 gp) has a monetary cost to create of 3,000 gp (half the base price) and an experience cost of 240 XP (1/25th the base cost).

On the other hand, a +1 magic weapon (such as a +1 *spiked gauntlet*) costs only 2,000 gp (for the magical enhancement). Another quick look at the table on page 288 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* shows that the amulet slot is best for items that involve protection and discernment, not attack, so it's a good bet that the amulet's price already had an adjustment for an uncusomary item slot. That makes sense, because almost any creature can wear an amulet or necklace and the amulet works on unarmed attacks and natural weaponry. The *amulet of mighty fists* probably also is intended for familiars and animal companions as well as monks.

That uncusomary item slot adjustment is x 1.5 (see Table 7-33), so the base cost and market price for the gauntlets would be 4,000 gp (6,000/1.5). The item should have the same caster level as a magic weapon with the same enhancement bonus (3 x the bonus), and it would require the Craft Wondrous item feat.

Okay, what happens if the character in question already has magic gauntlets, too, or just wants to keep that glove/gauntlet item slot available for some other useful item, such as *gauntlets of ogre power* or *gloves of Dexterity*? That's not a problem, either. There's no reason why someone could not create a *robe of mighty fists*, or a *vest of mighty fists*. Such items should have the same cost as the amulet (remember that we're assuming the amulet already has a cost increase of 50% for an uncusomary slot), so a +1 *vest* or *robe of mighty fists* would have a market price of 6,000 gp.

DMs who just aren't inclined to give the monk a break on such items might want to charge 6,000 gp for the amulet or gauntlets and 9,000 gp for the robe or the vest. I think that's excessive, and I suspect that most players would, too.

New Items

As noted back in Part One, creating an entirely new item requires writing a full item description, so let's talk about that. It would be helpful to be familiar with the elements in item description. [Rules of Game](#) covered that in detail.

The notes presented here are heavily based on ideas and advice from my colleagues Rich Baker and Sean K Reynolds.

Item Name

You can call an item whatever you want, but make sure you don't choose a name that suggests an item slot that doesn't fit the item. For example, don't call your new item a *skullcap of ultimate coolness* unless it actually uses the headband/hat/helmet/phylactery slot.

Description

Explain exactly what the item does and how often the item can do it, and what the user must do to activate the item. Remember that many kinds of items have default activation methods, such as spell trigger for a wand or staff, command word for a ring, rod or wondrous item, and use-activated for most weapons and items that provide bonuses.

A thorough explanation of the item's powers will help you set the item's price and also will avert many arguments down the road. Beware of evocative descriptions that sound great but don't have any meaning in the game. For example, an item that allows the user to steal another creature's dreams sounds cool, but what does it mean? Such a power could have several game effects. It might, for example, allow a brief glimpse into the subject's mind, much like a *discern thoughts* spell, or it might simply deny a sleeping victim the benefits of a full night's rest.

Aura

This is the kind of magic aura the item has when examined with a *detect magic* spell on it. List only the single most powerful or significant aura the item possesses (or that the item can produce). You should base this on the highest-level spell required to create the item.

Aura Power: Use one of the following:

Faint (caster level 5th or lower)

Moderate (caster level 6th-11th)

Strong (caster level 12th-20th)

Overwhelming (caster level 21st or more)

See the section on Caster Level for tips on assigning an item's caster level.

School: Choose the school from whatever prerequisite or power you used to set the aura power. If there is no spell for you to use here, use one of the following defaults:

Armor and protective items Abjuration

Weapons or offensive items Evocation

Bonus to ability scores, skills Transmutation

None of the above Transmutation

Caster Level

You can always set the caster level at the minimum for the highest-level spell involved with the item or for the highest-level caster level prerequisite for the item creation feats needed for the item.

You also can set the caster level higher than the absolute minimum necessary to create the item. In fact, it's a good idea to do this if you want your item to reflect some particular level-based variables in any spell effects the item produces. The examples of wand creation in Part Three show the effects of changing the caster level.

Some basic rules for setting a caster level follow:

Weapons and Armor: As noted in Part Four, weapons and armor have a minimum caster level of 3 times their enhancement bonus.

There's no hard and fast rule for setting the caster level for special properties. The best way to set a caster level for a special property is to find a comparable property in a rulebook and use that.

If a special property is similar to a spell, check out the notes on items that duplicate spells.

Item that Duplicate Spells: The caster level for a spell-producing item should be set at the minimum level required for item's creator to actually cast that spell. If you're a wizard making an item that produces *finger of death* (Sorcerer/Wizard 7), you should set the caster level at a minimum of 13, since you'd have to be a 13th-level wizard to cast *finger of death*.

Items that Mimic Spells: Many items do things that aren't spells, but could be spells. The various flight items, such as the *broom of flying* or *carpet of flying* are good examples. These items work very much like the *fly* spell or *overland flight* spell (which also is a prerequisite for both items).

Think about what spell this effect is most like.

Effects You've Never Seen Anywhere: A small number of magic items have powers that don't have any parallels elsewhere in the system. The *bag of holding* and similar items, such as *Heward's handy haversack*, are prime examples.

When an item doesn't do anything that can be easily compared to a spell, you should compare your item against other items that seem to do similar things, and set the caster level appropriately. If you still don't have any idea of how to set the caster level, use the minimum character level required by the particular item creation feat necessary to make the item.

Prerequisites

Your list of prerequisites must include the item creation feat necessary to make the item, the spells required, and any other prerequisites that you might care to include. Item creation feat names are pretty much self-explanatory. If you need help matching a feat to your item, refer to the earlier parts of this article series.

Spells: If your item duplicates or mimics several spells, each of those spells should appear in the list of prerequisites. On the other hand, don't go overboard here, especially when multiple spells do something similar to what your item does. For example, the *ring of force shield* has powers that are similar to both the *shield* and *wall of force* spells. This ring doesn't exactly duplicate a *shield* spell, however, and only *wall of force* is listed as a prerequisite.

What's Next?

Next week we'll look into the most demanding part of new item creation -- figuring out what a new item is worth.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for 18 years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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